THE IDEA OF EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF RORTIAN CONVERSATIONALISM

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In *Knowledge in a Social World*[1] Alvin Goldman distinguishes between two complementary areas of epistemology: individualistic epistemology and social epistemology. The former focuses on the conditions under which an individual is capable of acquiring knowledge by himself, with no need of interacting with others. The latter examines the conditions of cognitive exchange between individuals, along with the epistemic undertakings carried on by social groups. Meanwhile, in *Knowledge by Agreement*[2], Martin Kush claims that the first of these areas is a dead philosophical goal, since all knowledge must be understood in communitarian terms.

I want to emphasize that, even when these perspectives show a significant difference in focus, both are in need of an account of the concept of *epistemic community*. It is usually pointed out that the lack of conceptual accuracy regarding it is a characteristic deficit of perspectives that merge epistemology into sociology or politics. Goldman's acknowledgment of the need of a social epistemology, even when it is located within a general frame that keeps positioning perception (object of study of an individualistic epistemology) as the basis of the cognitive undertaking, accounts for the unavoidability in contemporary epistemology of the urge of answering the question of "what is an epistemic community?"

Now, certainly epistemologies of a clearly communitarian kind are particularly forced to provide an answer to that question. Catherin Elgin construes the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn and Richard Rorty as three communitarian approaches to knowledge; three ways of tacking the epistemological questions which emerge from the assumption that knowledge is a social phenomenon, and that consequently what should be analyzed are the social relations constituting the object and practice of inquiry. In her words, "Wittgenstein takes the culture as a whole to constitute the community of inquirers; Kuhn takes each scientific community to fix its own context; Rorty's community is rather harder to identify".[3]

In this paper, hence, I will aim to provide Rorty's conversationalism with some precision, by coming up with a clear notion of *epistemic community* that could serve to his purposes.

I will point out that the approach to the question must take into consideration the distinction between cooperation and mere coordination,[4] rejecting the idea that community only exists if the word enters as one of the cooperative terms.[5] An argument will be provided claiming that in the very foundation of an answer transcending merely coordinative perspectives it must be defended the insolubility between the concepts of community and normativity.[6]

Once these conceptual links are stressed, I will look at the kind of consensus required to classify something as an epistemic community in greater depth. The key will lay in the coordination of the notion of *epistemic*

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[1] A. Goldman (1999), *Knowledge in a Social World*, Oxford, Oxford U.P.
[2] M. Kusch (2002), *Knowledge by Agreement*, Oxford, Oxford U.P.

[3] C. Elgin (1996), *Considered Judgement*, Princeton, Princeton U.P., p. 60.
[4] See C. Tollefsen (2002), "Cooperative, Coordinative and Coercive Epistemology", in W. Alston (ed.)(2002), *Realism and Antirealism*, Ithaca/Lomdon, Cornell U.P.
[5] See C Tollefsen, *op. cit.*; J. McDowell (1994), *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Harvard U. P.; J. McDowell (2000), "Toward Rehabilitating Objectivity", in R. Brandom (2000), *Rorty and His Critics*, Massachusetts, Blackwell.
[6] This last point is the key to the following texts: L. Wittgenstein (1958), *Philosophical Investigations*, Londres, Blackwell; S. Kripke (1982), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Oxford, Blackwell; M. Lance y J Hawthorne (2004); *The Grammar of Meaning. Normativity and Semantic Discourse*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P.; M Kusch, *op. cit.*

community with the Rortian concept of *final vocabulary*, providing a basis for the idea of *shared final epistemic vocabulary* from two theoretical developments: (1) Brandom's grasp of the Hegelian idealist thesis claiming that the normative-conceptual dimension is shaped as the dimension of the constitution of subjectivity, which is no more than the social dimension of parallel constitution of the self and of the community; (2) Kusch's clarification of the doxastic architecture that holds justificatory practices in communitarian terms.

I

Susan Haack coined the expression "conversationalism" to refer to Rorty's pragmatism.[7] For Haack, conversionalism results from combining a contextualist explanation of the justification criteria and a convencionalist ratification of such criteria. The theses are articulated as follows:

Contextualism: "A is justified in believing *p* if regarding *p* A follows the epistemic guidelines of the epistemic community to which A belongs."

Conventionalism: the justification criteria are conventional; it is pointless to ask which the correct justification criteria are, which are really indicative of the probability of the truth of a sentence.

Haack's depiction of Rorty's perspective deserves to be corrected and widened. First, the perspective is completed with a deflationist/expressivist conception of truth. Presenting thus the Rortian understanding of truth conveys two things: on one side, the expressive usefulness of a series of uses of the truth-predicate (which Rorty calls "endorsing", "cautionary" and "disquotational") is recognized; on the other side, though, it is rejected either that such predicate has

explanatory uses and that it is possible to provide an explanation, in terms of some property, of what the true sentences have in common.[8] Second, it is important to clear up that the best way to shape Rorty's contextualism is through the conjunction of the idea, launched by Peirce and recently articulated by Robert Brandom and Michael Williams, that epistemic justification has a default/challenge structure.[9] Such idea involves taking a theoretical standpoint that gives no space for the foundationalist need of appealing to effective justificatory procedures for justifying beliefs. According to this standpoint, the lack of challenge allows to keep the epistemic status of beliefs, since the double demand of the traditional philosopher (which leads to skepticism) ceases to make sense; the demand that beliefs should show from the beginning their cognitive credentials and that it is not necessary to offer any reason in favor of the epistemic challenge. Third and last, it is better to jettison the conventionalist thesis (more suited to a non-Rortian relativism) and present the strictly conversationalist way of approaching the task of ratify the epistemic criteria, that is, what has been dubbed ethnocentric perspective, according to which "the correct justification criteria are *our own*". An ethnocentrism advocate would launch from admitting a contextualist position and, therefore, from agreeing on the fact that there is no way of providing a correction canon outside the different communitarian frames, since there is no being outside of community, outside of a frame. But the ethnocentrist adds that, once this is assumed, it cannot be concluded that the different correction canons stand at the same level. Accepting this would be hypocritical and would deny one's belonging to a certain frame, pretending to locate oneself instead in an impossibly neutral field in order to assert that

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[7] See S. Haack (1993), *Evidence and Inquiry Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, Oxford, Blackwell, chapter 9.

[8] See. R. Rorty (1991), "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth", in R. Rorty (1991), *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
[9] See concretely R. Brandom (1995), *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge/Lomdon, Harvard U.P., cap. 4; and M. Williams (2001), *Problems of Knowledge*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., chapters. 13, 14 y 16.

judgment of epistemic parity of different paradigms. I stand within a frame and I can acknowledge other frames. But my only resource is my own way of making assessments and, consequently, I cannot put myself outside any frame and from that Non-Place claim that there are merely different ways of assessment. Recognizing alterity, qua contextualist, is not incompatible with claiming that this other community holds to incorrect canons from my perspective, and to try to communicate somehow with it in order to transfer my points of view to it. Moreover, for a consistent, non-hypocritical contextualist, ethnocentrism is the only coherent standpoint.[10]

It is clear, then, how important it is to a conversationalist perspective to provide an account of what it is understood as "community", if it means something more than the mere agreement in certain epistemic canons.

II

Recently, Christopher Tollefsen[11] has distinguished three kinds of relations among agents: coercion, coordination and cooperation. Coercion implies some degree of violence or the use of strength, in such a way that, ultimately, the agent on which the force is applied looses responsibility. Coercive action does not respect the freedom of the agent on which it is operated and, in turn, the subject of it must not share the wish of the coercive agent. It is even noted that in an action carried on conjunctly by two agents, one of them the subject of coercion and the other its agent, there is only one genuine agent.

Coordination of an action by two agents, in turn, requires that:

(1) both agents differ in their aims

but that

(2) those aims are such that they can be more efficiently attained if each agent understands the way in which the other plans to act and both expect to mutually benefit from this mutual recognition of aims and means.

Cooperative action replaces clause (1) above by:

(1*) both agents aim at the same goal

Tollefsen points out that no any goal can be the aim of a cooperative aim. Clause (1*) demands for objective goals. According to Tollefsen, a genuine community can only be possible under cooperative conditions, that is, if there are shared objective goals.

On the basis of these distinctions, Tollefsen posits a critique to Rortian conversationalism (but also to Bonjour's coherentism and to all kinds of naturalist externism) on the basis that such a model is associated to a coordinative and, hence, anticommunitarian perspective. His description of Rorty´s position is the following:

> "For Rorty, truth is not to be construed in a realist fashion but is simply a term of commendations for beliefs approved by one's linguistic community. For members of such community, the space of reasons is normative, a space of asking for and giving reasons for beliefs, and is guided by community norms. The world, by contrast, exerts only a causal agency over speakers."[12]

The description is adequate, even when it doesn't show from it that Rorty cannot make room in his conception of epistemic community to the idea of shared goals. In fact, a nice part of the discussion between Rorty and Kuhn is articulated in terms of replacing inconmensurabilist

[10] I have developed this characterization of Rortian ethnocentrism in several papers. See F. Penelas (2005), "Universalismo, relativismo, etnocentrismo", in E. Carrió y D. Maffía (eds.) (2005), *Búsquedas de sentido para una nueva política*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, pp. 151-174; and F. Penelas (2007), "Kalpokas ironista: falibilismo, neofundacionismo y pragmatismo", in P. Brunsteins y A. Testa (eds.) (2007), **Conocimiento, normatividad y acción**, FFyH-UNC, Córdoba, pp. 597-604.

[11] C. Tollefsen, *op. cit.*

[12] C. Tollefsen, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

versions of the distinction between normal discourse/revolutionary discourse for versions in terms of discourse about means/ discourse about goals. It is true that the objective aspect of the goals, demanded without an argumentative basis by Tollefsen, demanded of an inter-subjective adjustment in Rorty's layout, but, as we shall see ahead, such an adjustment is within reach. However, Tollefsen adds:

> "A linguistic community can be glossed in similar fashion around the notion of norms. A linguistic community just is a group of language users who share a set of norms for what counts as appropriate and inappropriate, justified and unjustified language use. And the extension of a community, for Rorty, just is the extension of intersubjetive agreement as to which norms are in play. The question is, What force can be given to the notion of "agreement" here sufficient to ground genuine community? Can the norms of the linguistic community be shared, possess the same concept, be accepted for the same reasons froma gent to agent within the community?"[13]

Tollefsen answers that norms could do all this "if the point of accepting the norms was that they enabled the members of a linguistic community to grasp and communicate aspects of non-human reality".[14] Curiously, Tollefsen defends the need of thinking the rational responsibility shared by the members of a community as requiring, from the community itself, the location of its members in a cognitive relation towards the world from which a common content would emerge, and from this one, a shared –not merely convergent- acceptance of the norms in question, along with a certain flair of circularity. And it is defended by Tollefsen standing on a McDowellian model consisting in thinking the world itself as involved in cooperative relations with the members of the community. Evidently McDowell's and Tollefsen's way out, both launching from the assuming a normative dimension in knowledge along with a representationalist frame, should endorse the idea that the world itself is the provider of concepts and reasons, if it doesn't want to open an insuperable

epistemic gap between mind and world. But if the price to pay is the adoption of what Kush calls *panpsychism*, maybe it is more reasonable to abandon representationalism and explore the way in which conversationalism can provide an adequate characterization of the concept of epistemic community. The idea of the world as a "communitarian peer" to which we are responsible is the focus of Rorty's critique to McDowell and, maybe, the core of the Rortian opposition to all forms of representationalism. Indeed, to Rorty, every hint, in the explanation either of normativity in general or of our epistemic responsibilities in particular, of relations towards something non-human instead of relations between other humans is a conservative trace in the midst of the secularization process. Placing a non-human instance as a source of authority is a way of remaining in a theological (and deeply authoritarian) stage in which, when facing the non-human, all we have left is ignorance, error, respect or obedience, but never the modification of authority by means of our own intervention. A good part of modern philosophy, according to Rorty, merely replaced God by something extra-human serving as the source of authority: Reason, Reality, World.

Located inside this matrix, McDowell, with his idea of openness to the world, of being responsible to the world, takes the most unexpected turn: he assumes the intersubjective model and places the world as the privileged interlocutor. Kusch has been particularly caustic in his emphasis of the theological hue of the proposal, noting that both the foundationalist and the McDowellian direct realist participate of this anti-secularism but with a substantial divergence:

> "Is not McDowell's world as expert witness remarkably similar to the foundationalist's priestly apparitions? The only difference is that McDowell has got rid of the priest as an intermediary. In his scenario God (or the world) speaks to all beliefs directly and without any mediation. (The theology of direct realism is

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[14] *Ibid.*

Protestant, whereas the theology of foundationalism is Catholic."[15]

Rorty's conversationalism is launched basically as an anti-authoritarian bet, resisting one and again the attempt to entrench non-human authorities.[16] In this undertaking, conversationalism takes the McDowellian "need for world-directedness as a relic of the need for authoritative guidance".[17]

III

The notion of *epistemic community* should be articulated in Rorty within his concept of *final vocabulary*, which is presented by him as "a set of words which [human beings] employ to justify their actions, their beliefs and their lifes".[18] Such a vocabulary is ultimate in two senses: on the one hand, its user cannot argue in favor of the use of those words in a non-circular way; on the other hand, these are the words that posit a limit in communication, "beyond them there is only helpless

passivity or a resort to force"[19] or, as Rorty defends in his political writings, the sentimental "manipulation".

Following this line of thought, we should say that an epistemic community is nothing else than a set of individuals which coincide in an final vocabulary related to certain epistemic values. However, the characterization of this coincidence should be made carefully. Kusch appeals to a distinction between two types of consensus which he calls "external consensus" and "internal consensus". External consensus is a mere coincidence of beliefs held by several individuals. Internal consensus, in turn, involves a collective commitment. Kusch compares the case of a bus in which all of the passengers coincide to believe -even without conveying or communicating it- that it will stop in a number of places along the ride, and a committee where, after a long deliberation, a final decision is taken in accordance to the final decision of the assembly. The example of the bus is a case of external consensus, while the committee case exemplifies the internal one. Interaction is central in the latter, and leads to a consensus that implies a collective commitment.

The epistemic community considered as a coincidence in epistemic final vocabulary, must be seen in terms of internal consensus to constitute an acceptable conception of knowledge. However, it would be absurd to think of the coincidence in the adoption of a final vocabulary under the model of the committee. In Rorty´s perspective there is nothing such as a deliberation leading to an explicit commitment. It is for this reason that, in my own view, it is necessary to think the epistemic community, understood as an agreement in a certain final epistemic vocabulary, under the Brandomian model of agreements and implicit commitments in the very justificatory practices. Brandom's model is forced to revise and appropriate a series of elements of Hegel's philosophy, in order to

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[15] M. Kusch, *ob. cit.*, p. 111.

[16] It is worth to note here that, in his famous "The Fixation of Belief", Peirce assesses this appeal to a non-human authority in the scientific method as the method for the fixation of belief. This is the greater gap between Rorty and Peirce, the point from where all the rest of their divergences emerge. The Peircean text is, regarding this point, revealing, and it is strange that Rorty hasn't made most of it in transforming in order to favor his secularist perspective. Indeed, Peirces values from the scientific method that, in contrast to the authority method, doomed since there is no human institution capable of maintain lasting consensus, it proposes as an heuristic hypothesis a non-human authority, reality, to wich humans must bow. Here lays the authoritarian roots of the Peircean assessment. The theological root is even more explicit, since Peirce desestimates the mystic demand of appealing to the method of revelation, where the authority is also external and non-human. The mystic problem is, merely, that it cannot escape the dimension of the individual. See C. S. Peirce (1931-1958), *Collected Papers*, Cambridge, Harvard U. P, Vol. 5 §384

[17] R. Rorty (1998), "John McDowell's Version of Empiricism", in R. Rorty (1998), *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., p. 143.

[18] R. Rorty (1988), *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., p. 73.

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[19] *Ibid*.

avoid thinking on those implicit commitments under the bus model. Given the already quoted question of Tollefsen of the already asked question of Tollefsen – "can the norms of a linguistic community be shared, possess the same content, be accepted by the same reasons from agent to agent within the community?"- Brandom's layout will allow providing an answer to the first two aspects of it from within the conversationalist frame. Regarding the third aspect, whether norms are accepted by the same reasons or not, their ultimate character in the Rortian perspective makes this worry superfluous.

The Brandomian argument to which I would like to appeal starts by presenting the Hegelian conception of a self as an "I". Its source is the Kantian idea, reintroduced by Hegel, that claims that treating something as an "I" is to take an essential normative attitude towards it, taking it as the subject of commitments and the potential bearer of responsibilities. Brandom's point is that one of the basic Hegelian ideas is that normative states such as "being committed to" and "being responsible of" –and henceforth, knowledge and agency- should be construed as social results. In to Brandom´s words:

> "The practical attitude of taking or treating something as able to undertake commitments and be responsable for its doings –in the sense articulated bi *concepts*, that is, the sense in which at least part of what one is commited to or responsable for is being able to give *reasons*- Hegel calls "recognition" [*Anerkennung*]. The core idea structuring Hegel's social understanding of selves is that they are synthesized by *mutual recognition*. That is, to be a self –a locus of conceptual commitment and responsibility- is to be taken or treated as one by those one takes or treats as one: to be recognized by those one recognizes. [...] At the same time and by the same means that *selves*, in this normative sense, are synthesized, so ar *communities*, as structural wholes of selves all of whom recognize and are recognized by one another. Both selves and communities are normative structures instituted by reciprocal recognition"[20]

This instance of mutual recognition as constitutive of the self and of the community offers the context for the assumption of concept content, following the pragmatist maxim which claims that every content is instituted in the very same process in which it is applied:

> "The actual *content* of the commitment one undertakes by applying a concept (paradigmatically, by using a word) is the product of a process of *negotiation* involving the reciprocal attitudes, and the reciprocal authority, of those who *attribute* the commitment and those who acknowledge it. What the content of one's claim or action is *in* itself results both *for* what it is for others and what it is *for* oneself".[21]

This process of negotiation of demands of commitments in competence is what Hegel calls "experience" [*Erfahrung*].

But such an "experience" does not only officiate as context, but also serves as a model for the explanation of the structure and unity of concepts. Hegel's idea, according to Brandom, is that every norm is conceptual and that every time there is a norm in play several centers of reciprocal authority and a process of negotiation among them should be distinguished. In his words:

> "the commitment one undertakes by applying a concept in judgement and action can be construed as determintaly contentful only if it is to be administered by othersdistinct form the one whose commitment it is. So in acknowledging such a commitment, one is at least implicitly recognizing the authority of others over the content to which one has commited oneself."[22]

In this way, it is noticeable the way in which Brandom takes from Hegel, in order to make room to a pragmatist semantic theory, the idealist thesis according to which the normative-conceptual dimension is modeled under the dimension of the constitution of subjectivity, which is no more than the social dimension of the parallel constitution of the self and the community. But,

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[20] R. Brandom (2003), *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Cambridge, Harvard U. P., pp. 216-217

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 221.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 223

inasmuch every norm is conceptual, and inasmuch the "self" of the community are normative states, the conjunctive constitution of individual subjects and of community is constructed in the very same process of "experience", of conceptual negotiation. Hence, it would be a mistake to think that there is a first stage in which subjects are constituted on which, afterwards, semantic contents are built up. The point is, instead, that the process of the constitution of the self and of the community through the mutual recognition of authority is unfolded in the negotiation of the semantic normative characteristic of the application of concepts. It is for this reason that, besides thinking the constitution of the "self" as a model for conceptual constitution, it is the unfolding of such a constitution what shapes the constitution of the self and the community.

I think that these Brandomian developments are essential for making it even more plausible certain Rortian insights, clearing out thus the critiques that tend to show his perspective as a "choreographic" conception of knowledge, as McDowell puts it[23]. The imbrications between the notions of *community, commitment* and *normativity* seem to make this simplifying construal of conversationalism a not very happy one.

Nevertheless, resting on the Brandomian appropriation of the Hegelian analysis of recognition is not enough to a complete account of an epistemic community. The Brandom/Hegel contribution is essential for approaching the configuration of every kind of community. In order to complete the depiction, and to articulate more precisely the Rortian-conversationalist configuration of the notion of *epistemic* community in terms of consensus in a final vocabulary of epistemic character, I

find particularly useful to appeal to the communitarian treatment of the notion of justification developed by Kusch.

IV

The first step in Kusch's argument is to establish a taxonomy of the beliefs that determine, with different functions, the empirical discourse. The taxonomy is based in two distinctions: the empirical/performative difference and the individual/communitarian difference.

The communitarian beliefs are those whose subject is a plural believer, in the sense that the attribution of the proposicional attitude in question has to be expressed in a sentence with a grammatical subject in a person of the plural (paradigmatically, the first person of the plural, particularly, as we shall see, in cases of performative beliefs), in contrast with the attribution of individual beliefs, expressible in sentences whose grammatical subject is a person of the singular (paradigmatically, the first person of the singular).[24]

Regarding the first distinction, it is presented by Kusch in the following way: "empirical beliefs aim to fit some aspect of the empirical world; performative beliefs create a psychological or social reality that accords with them."[25]

These two distinctions constitute, in consequence, four kinds of beliefs: communal performative beliefs, communal empirical beliefs, individual performative beliefs and individual empirical beliefs. The most important distinction in this instance is that between communal performative and communal empirical beliefs:

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[23] "Without this difference [the difference between the question "to whom?" and the question "in the light of what?"], there would be no ground for conceiving one's activity as making claims about, say, whether or not cold fusion has occurred, as opposed to achieving unison with one's fellows in some perhaps purely decorative activity on a level with a kind of dancing" (J. McDowell (2000), "Toward Rehabilitating Objectivity", p. 118).

[24] Kusch is a bit confusing at this point, since he doesn't distinguish between sentences expressing the adscription of propositional attitudes from sentences expressing the attributed content.
[25] M. Kusch, *ob. cit.,* p. 141.

The general form of communal performative beliefs is 'we believe in, and thereby constitute, the social fact that *p*'. The general form of communal empirical beliefs is 'we believe, on the basis of experience, that *p*'."[26]

Examples of one and the other can be helpful to understand the distinction:

i) We (the members of the Astronomic International Association (AIA)) believe that to count as a "major planet" of our solar system, a planet must have a diameter of at least 2000 kms.

ii) We (the members of the Astronomic International Association (AIA)) believe that the object dubbed TO66 is not a major planet of our solar system.[27]

The distinction between individual empirical and individual performative beliefs is hard to trace, particularly because it is not clear what kind of belief would be an individual performative one –Kusch tries to throw some light by means of examples like "I believe that I am holding a belief" or "I think that I think", but he doesn't develop enough their performative character-. Individual empirical beliefs are of the same kind of communitarian empirical beliefs, differing only in the singular grammatical subject.

In turn, individual empirical beliefs are divided in two classes: the purely individual empirical ones, that is, those without any direct reference whatsoever to the community of "believers"; and the group-involving individual beliefs, that is, those in which the subject in

first person of the singular places his/her belonging to a community a constitutive part of the belief. The "logic form" of both kinds of individual beliefs differs: the purely ones has a form as "I believe that *p*", those containing the community within them have a form as "I (being one of us) believe that *p*". Distinguishing both kinds of individual beliefs is important, according to Kusch, for achieving an understanding of the existence of communal beliefs, inasmuch these cannot be thought of as beliefs held by something like a "group mind" or "the mind of a community". Groups, for Kusch, cannot be thought of as holding mental states above and independently of the individuals constituting them. Thus, only individual beliefs count as mental phenomena, while communitarian beliefs have to be thought of as social phenomena constituted by group-involving individual beliefs. Kusch's core thesis is that the relation between communitarian and individual beliefs has to be construed under the following general formula: A communal belief 'that *p*' exists if and only if there exists a group of individuals such that each one of them believes 'that *p*' in a group-involving way.

What follows in Kusch's presentation is the analysis of the nature of the relation between communal and individual empirical beliefs. On the one side, the analysis involves taking into account how is the passage from individual to communal beliefs, and how it is that an individual is capable of adopting the communal beliefs of a certain group. It is clear that a purely individual belief can become a communal one and thus an individual belief involving the community as a constituent (which happens whenever a certain content is believed first by an individual and afterwards it is adopted by an entire group). In contrast, the adoption by an individual of a belief held by the community can happen in two different ways: either the individual enters the community and hence acquires an individual belief with the community as a constituent, or the individual remains alien to the community and the adopted belief is purely individual.

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[26] *Ibid*.

[27] These are Kusch examples. Maybe the possibility of undermine the proposal by appealing to the fact all of what Kusch shows is reduced to terminological differences could be dissolved if the examples appealed go performative beliefs revolving around what defines, for example, clinical death. The epistemological relevance of the distinction between communitarian beliefs, performative and empirical, would be much clearer. I thank Agustin Rayo and Sergio Martinez for the combination of objection and counter-objection that motivated this point.

The next point to consider regarding the relation between individual and communal empirical beliefs is one of major epistemological relevance. For Kusch the very notions of *knowledge* and *justification* must be considered on the basis of the relations between these two kinds of beliefs. According to him:

> "It seems that challenges to, and justifications of, empirical beliefs usually involve communal empirical beliefs. We typically challenge new beliefs on the grounds that they do not mesh with beliefs that we all subscribe to. And usually we defend beliefs by showing that they follow from, or fit with, beliefs that we all share. To a considerable degree communal empirical beliefs thus are the touchstone for whether or not purely individual empirical beliefs rise to the status of communal beliefs".[28]

Thus, the structure of justification itself, the structure of challenge and defense, rests in communal beliefs. Besides, in order for a belief to reach the status of knowledge, it is a necessary (though not sufficient)[29] condition that it is transformed into a communal belief. This necessity is explained, in Kusch's considerations, by noting that *knowledge* is a social status in the same way in which "married" or "divorced" are such. Given that only the communities and their representatives can impose on someone or something the status of "social", a social status presuppose communities. Namely, regarding knowledge, and in order to acquire such status, it is a necessary condition of any of my beliefs to be shared by others and, because of this, it implies the constitution of an epistemic community.

In the same way, according to Kusch, beliefs cannot be individually justified since justification is also a social status. The fact that my peers accept the beliefs I offer them as justification of some other belief implies that they share those beliefs with me. But, and with this Kusch takes a crucial leap, cannot I, in solitude, without consulting no one, assess that I know that *p*? Kusch

answer: of course I can, but to assess that I know that *p* doesn't equal knowing that *p*. Knowing that *p* requires social interaction. But, even more, the social aspect of justification and knowledge is shown in turn if I wonder: what is it what I do when I assess myself in solitude as knowing that *p*? What I do is to predict a successful exchange in which my belief survives challenges. In Kusch's words:

> "I am, however, free to anticipate their success in such a forum and think of them as knowledge even prior to such testing. In thinking of my beliefs as knowledge I am making a prediction as to how they will fare. […] Clearly the rational way to convince myself is to have a '*pretend* challenge–defence discussion' with people I am familiar with. […] In other words, coming to convince myself is actually to form a pretend communal belief with pretend others. And this is clearly parasitic on the case where the others and their objections are real rather than imagined."[30]

As a consequence of these considerations it follows that individual beliefs cannot be justified, given that justification is a social status and, besides this, in order for something to be knowledge it must be the object of a communal belief. In this way the Rortian analysis is articulated better in terms of the social character of justification.

However, Kusch's analysis has just started, since in it they will be the communal performative beliefs the ones playing the main role in the epistemological structure. This is thus because, according to Kusch's communitariansm, the empirical beliefs, both communal and individual, bear as a possibility condition some communal performative beliefs. Let's examine the case of communal empirical beliefs. Take the sentence

m) The AIA believes that there are nine major planets in our solar system.

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[28] M. Kusch, *ob. cit.*, p. 146.
[29] The no-sufficiency is explained by an appeal to the fact that a community cannot hold a belief and at the same time believe that they lack enough evidence for it.

[30] M. Kusch, *ob. cit.*, p. 148.

Articulated thus, (m) can be read as a communitarian belief empirical as much as performative

m') The AIA believes (in the basis of experience) that there are nine major planets in our solar system.
m'') The AIA believe (and consequently constitutes a classification criteria that makes it such) that there are nine major planets in our solar system.

This double reading shows that communal beliefs presuppose performative ones. The last ones constitute classification criteria that afterwards are used by the first ones.

But there is a different sense in which communal empirical beliefs presuppose performative ones. Inasmuch communities are in turn social institutions, they have to be constituted by performative communitarian beliefs. Thus, in the example, the empirical belief (m') is based not only in (m'') but, also, in other implicit communal performative belief, that has the particular trait of being *community-introducing* or *community-constitutive*:

M) "We (the members of the AIA) believe that we have a system of obligations and commitments that define us a AIA and that authorizes us to adopt in community certain empirical beliefs."

The implicit character of (M) pressuposses the idea that every communal performative belief is at the same time a communal performative belief of the community-constitutive kind. Thus, ultimately, every communal empirical belief needs of all this structure of communal performative beliefs. Precisely these communal beliefs constitutive of communities account, regarding the case of epistemic communities, for the phenomenon of recognition analyzed by Brandom in a Hegelian key.

Let's turn now to the case of the individual empirical beliefs. These also involve classifications and, hence,

social institutions. Thus, on the one side, the individual beliefs involving communities as constituents such "I, as a member of AIA, believe that TO66 is not a major planet of our solar system" are fragments, according to Kusch, of communal performative beliefs constituting classification. Moreover, for an individual to achieve the status of "knower", she must be able to convince others of conforming with her a communitarian belief. This will pressupose the constitution of a new minimal community, but necessarily it will have to presuppose some previous communities, provided that without the existence of previous communities no new belief can be justified.

This is the core point of Kusch's frame. To unfold it we need to make a terminological clarification. "Rule" is distinguished from "norm" considering the explicitness and the implicitness in practice. Rules are standards and prescriptions explicitly articulated, while norms are standards and prescriptions not explicitly established but involved in concrete practices. The point is which norms constitute the justificatory practice, and how do we apprehend those norms.

The answer of Kusch has an explicitly Kuhnean inspiration: we know norms inasmuch as we know exemplars shared by the community. Exemplars are cases of actions and beliefs adopted to comply with norms. Thus, Kusch introduces a new kind of beliefs, that is, the norm-constituting communal performative beliefs. These are beliefs about the exemplarity-role of cases of a certain kind. The general form of norm-constituting communal performative beliefs for the justificatory practice is

J) "We believe that beliefs of the kind X are justified if they comply with criteria Y; and the following are EJEMPLARES cases in which instantiations of X fulfill criteria Y: (and a list of cases follows)"
or

J') "We believe that beliefs of the kind X are justified if they are so in the same way in which the following beliefs are justified (and a list of cases follows)".

In consequence, for Kusch, inasmuch each exemplar is constituted by a belief/evidence pair, the justification of a belief on the basis of particular evidence involves showing that the relation between belief and its evidence is *similar* or *analogous* to that of the exemplars accepted by the community. Every justification implies judgments on similitude or analogy and as judgments, they are apt of being tested, for no justification can be accepted once and forever. Justifications, for Kusch, is relative not only to the exemplars adopted by a community but also to the similitude judgments linking a determinate belief-evidence pair with one or more of those exemplars.

Along with this "synchronic" relativity of justification, there is obviously a "diachronic" relativity. The meaning of "justification" can change –as in fact it does- in different communities along with the set of exemplars. This proves that justificatory norms are at the same time of the result of justification acts and the determinants of justificatory acts. Norm-constituting communal performative beliefs change, in more or less degree, with each interaction.

But the importance of the frame lays in the fact that the final standpoint of justification are norm-constituting communal performative beliefs not founded in experience nor in the assessment of their adjustment to the world or to a canon or extra-communitarian rationality, but based instead in historical contingent agreements, revisable and implicit in each justificatory judgment. It is in this way how Kusch depicts the dialectical character of justification, as a case of the dialectical structure of all social institution.

It is precisely this structure the kind of doxastic warp that can be thought as configuring what in Rortian terms would constitute the *final epistemological vocabulary* shared by an epistemic community, which in turn is configured through implicit *community-constitutive* communal performative beliefs. There are these categories what make possible to understand with a greater depth the kind of characterization of the idea of epistemic community that can be provided from within the frame of Rortian conversationalism.

V

Finally, I would like to refer to certain consequences involving the notion of consensus that follow from Kusch's perspective and that will allow making some final clarifications around Rorty's perspective.

Indeed, Kusch presents a mechanic analogy in order to constitute three different models in which consensus can be characterized. One of these models will allow us to understand the determinant/determined nature of relations between social institutions and particular interactions. Besides, the model is particularly useful to understand how norms rule in groups wide enough as to make it impossible for each individual to be aware of the beliefs and justifications of all the others. The three models of consensus constitution to be presented are: 1) the unique authority model; 2) the unique average model; 3) the multiple but local model. It will be (3) the relevant model to the understanding in question.

The analogy that allows their characterization is presented as follows. A set of clocks are imagined, each one with their own "individuality", that is, its own speed to move their needles. Case (1) assumes that there is a master clock that every now and then adjusts the other ones to its own time setting by means of a periodical reset. Case (2) assumes that all the clocks are connected to one another in a way that the periodical reset adjust all of them to the average time calculated on the basis of information that each provide to the entire set. Case (3) is such that all the clocks are mounted on wheels and

can move freely within a limited space, bumping against each other at random. Every time two clocks collide they carry on the following operation: they estimate the average of their respective hour data and reset mutually to this average. Next the clocks keep on at their own speed and keep on moving in space until they bump into another clock.

The last case is analogous to a social institution in which no member has access to the actions of the rest and where there is convergence in divergence, since only in very extraordinaire circumstances could happen that, at some point, all the clocks would tell exactly the same time. Moreover, this is the most relevant case, according to Kusch, to understand how social institutions determine and are determined by interaction: the hour of every clock is adjusted only in bumps between two each time and it would be erroneous to assume that these encounters imply some sort of priority in regards to the relations of each clock to the rest of the clock community. What each clock contributes to the one-to-one encounter is determined by the previous encounters with other clocks of the same community. The frequent and random interaction among clocks makes their hours fluctuate within a limited bandwidth. Kusch claims that communities have this very same characteristic and adds that if this were not the case for communitarian beliefs too, it would be hard to understand how institutions change and why monitoring, correcting and sanctioning the rest of the members of the community is important.

There is, however, a tension that introduces saying that model (3) is the best analogy for what happens in epistemic communities. The point is that (3) renders extraordinaire the fact that all the clocks tell the same time, while it doesn't seem extraordinaire the fact that all the members of a community share the same belief, particularly in the case of norm-constituting communal performative beliefs. The point Kusch emphasizes is that, indeed, there lays the limit of the analogy, but that to force it allows us to understand the fact that the

commitment to different justificatory canons can be provided with subtle divergences in different cases of particular epistemic evaluations (without making those divergences significant) and, in turn, it allows to explain the communitarian dynamics and with it, the permanent mutability of justificatory canons.

This model of multiple but local consensus establishes the need to make an important clarification to what I said in a previous work regarding the distinction between *partial* and *global consensus*.[31] There I maintained that Rorty could perfectly distinguish conceptually the notion of *justification* from the notion of *majority consensus*, but that he couldn't defend in the same way the conceptual independence between *justification* and *global consensus*, that is, consensus along an entire community (with the exception maybe of some individuals which are in turn epistemologically disqualified in the community). Besides, a consequence of Kusch's model (3) is to make global consensus appear to be an isolated phenomenon in the epistemic dynamic of communities. Is this a problem for Rorty's conversationalism? I would say it is not. It would be if we construed Rorty as pointing out that the aforementioned conceptual link should be seen as a definition of *justification* in terms of global consensus. However, reading Rorty thus would be incorrect. What I emphasized that follows from Rorty's works (not emphasized in the previous bibliography) is, actually, that global consensus is, at the best case scenario, sufficient condition for justification. This reading is reinforced, in turn, with the consideration of the conception according to which justification carries on a default/challenge structure. Indeed, global consensus, as an instance of lack of challenge to the belief in question, is enough to justify it. That such a consensus is an isolated phenomenon doesn't eschew the relevance of the conceptual link pointed out by Rorty. What Kusch contributes (besides the detailed analysis of the linkages

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[31] F. Penelas (2003), "La justificación como hecho social", *Dianoia*, vol. XLVIII, nº 51, pp. 127-134.

among the different kinds of belief, which sustains the dialectical characterization of justification based on exemplars and similitude judgments) is an explanation of how, in spite of the perennial divergence, it occurs within a range of reasonability that allows the degree of consensus necessary to talk about justification of beliefs in a certain communitarian context.